



Survey into the Causes of Consistent Failure in SSCE in English Language in Yobe State: A Study of Yobe, Zamfara, Abia and Edo States' Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

This study surveys the causes of massive failure in Senior School Certificate Examination. (SSCE). It investigates the causes of students' massive failure in English language in 47 Secondary Schools in Yobe state. It seeks to find out the major elements that bring about persistent and consistent setback to students' success in their final year of examination. The study uses mixed methods as a means of data collection which include both qualitative and quantitative sets of data. The study was conducted for a period of seven months. Where some selected secondary schools were visited to administer questionnaires in Zamfara, Edo and Abia States. The findings of the study revealed that among other things, lack of qualified language teachers, poor state of infrastructure, curricular, and students' attitudes toward learning generally are the main causes of heavy failure in Yobe State. The study finally suggests that the government should set up very strong supervisory team that will look after truant teachers.

1. BACKGROUND

There have been so many outcries on the woeful performance of secondary school students in senior certificate examinations with special focus on English language. In fact, government, education bodies, institutions, and concerned parents bemoan yearly on the weak performances of their students in these examinations. Poor performances especially in English language become extremely disturbing to stakeholders giving the importance of English language in educational development. As an example, admission into higher institutions in most countries Nigeria is not an exception and impossible without a pass in English (Khabyr, Amadi, 2015). Poor performance in English language and mathematics occupies the dominant hours in the curriculum of Nigeria. They are normally the first courses to be taught in almost all government secondary schools (National Policy on Education, 2014). Although it is an official language in Gambia, students in the country often fail English language and this may be as a result of poor attention given to it, lack of reading and writing English with the negative notion students have on the subject (Nijie, 2013). Lack of qualified teachers, the assured nature

of the environment speaking vernacular in schools. (Nijie 2013) in this regard. In Ghana, for instance, based on West African examination result (WAEC) 2018, 193,882 candidates, representing 61.67% sat for the exams but 99,402 which represents (31%) obtained D7 – E8 in the English language while 21.61% obtained F9 in English language. Their failure was mostly attributed to negative impact of modern-day technology, that “everybody is busy on WhatsApp” instead of the students to spend more time reading very good books, textbooks, literature and English books, which will improve their command of English language (Wahab, 2018).

Scholars and researchers in Nigeria have taken the same course in lamenting the sad performances of Nigeria students in English Language (Adegbile 2006, Orlureni 2012, Njemanze, 2012). These disturbing trends have been chasing our students into and out of tertiary institutions as can be obviously seen, that a lot of graduates find it very difficult to express themselves in English. Some scholars suggest that if English is the language of job, education and other potential opportunities it will be taught or handled with great caution (Njemanze, 2012). In this light, this study sets out to look into this ugly trend and suggest ways to improve teaching and learning of English in Yobe state secondary schools so as to improve students' performance in senior school certificate exam.

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1.1 Statement of the problem

English language is the instrument of communication in primary, secondary and higher institutions as well as the official language of Yobe state. If these students can pass through these stages of learning there is no justification whatsoever for students' performance to be so woeful consistently. Going by the annual budget, Yobe state has been increasing the percentage of education budget with at least 2% annually from 2007 to 2012 (EFU & FSU 2013).

Secondary school students need effective knowledge of English language to function properly or perform better and importantly to get admitted into institutions of higher learning which is the utmost aim. Fema (2003) States that a functional person is someone who is literate, that is, someone who acquires the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enables him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed significant in his culture or group. English language normally has four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is assumed that Yobe state students would be able to demonstrate these skills in their SSCE but what was observed in the last five years was totally the opposite. It is disheartening to note that the poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of decline in the general academic performance and standard of education in Yobe state. Oluwole (2008) was of the view that having difficulty in grasping the full contents of English language can lead to failure in other subjects that are taught in English as medium of instruction. Daily Trust of Wednesday, August 25, 2010 reported that "seventy-five per cent of candidates who sat for May/June WAEC 2010 examinations failed to meet the minimum entry requirement into tertiary institutions, Yobe state was at the bottom. When WAEC released its May/June 2014 WASSCE results, the result shows mass failure in mathematics and English language in Yobe state while Edo and Abia were rated as the top performers. In 2012 and 2013 May/June WASSCE there was marginal decline in the performance of candidates in English language. It was learnt that Yobe State government has expressed displeasure over the massive failure of students who sat for the 2016 SSCE and NECO examinations especially in English language and Mathematics. Edo State came third with 38, 052 of it 62, 327 candidates got Five credits and above and it was the first in ranking in 2015. Yobe state came last with just 646 candidates obtaining five credits and above including English language. This came at a time where Yobe state voted 17.3 percent of its 2016 budget in order to improve the situation. Seven other northern states

took rear positions as follows: They are Zamfara (36th), Jigawa (35th), Gombe (34th), Katsina (33rd), Kebbi (32nd) Bauchi (31st) and Sokoto state (30th). (Daily Trust, 3th June, 2016). This study therefore will seek to investigate this trend of steady failure in English language by senior secondary school students in Yobe State and to contribute to the existing knowledge.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study investigates the causes of massive and consistent failure in English language in SSCE in Yobe state. Specifically, it sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the problems that cause these massive failures in English language in SSCE in Yobe State.
2. To ascertain the differences if any in the English language curriculum, use in Yobe state Secondary Schools and the one provided by the SSCE bodies.
3. To examine the level of commitments of the stakeholders towards the success of English language in Yobe state.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to explore the possibility that the above trends are related, this study poses the following inquiries:

1. What are the problems that cause massive failure in English language in SSCE in Yobe state?
2. Are there differences between the curriculum used in Yobe state secondary schools and the one provided by SSCE bodies?
3. To what extent are the stakeholders in secondary schools committed towards the success of English language in SSCE in Yobe state?

1.4 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the theory of learning style founded by David Kolb (1984). This approach to learning stresses that individuals have different ways of processing and understanding things. It implies that how much individuals have more to do with whether the educational experience is geared towards their particular learning style. The learning styles theory is rooted in the research demonstrating as a result of some factors such as heredity, upbringing and some environmental demands. Different individuals have a tendency to both perceive and process information differently. These unique ways are classified into concrete and abstract perceivers. Concrete perceiver draw information through direct experience, by doing, practicing, acting sensing and

feeling. Abstract perceivers on the other hand take in information through analysis and thinking.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Numerous important outcomes can be envisaged from this research. Firstly, to the knowledge of the researchers, study of this nature was never carried out in Yobe state. So this study will provide a holistic picture of what is happening with teaching and learning English language in Yobe state secondary schools. Secondly, since the study is a comparative study, it will provide framework work that can be adopted from other states to minimize the rate of failure in English language in SSCE. Thirdly, and importantly, the rate of dropouts in the higher institutions of learning in Yobe state will be reduced as the number of failure in English language will be minimized. In addition, this study will also foster greater understanding on the part of the government regarding challenges towards teaching and learning English language in secondary schools. Finally, the study will also force the teachers to study and work hard to prove their competences in their chosen aspects. After all, they now have the freedom to choose which aspects they love to teach. Students too will now have the unique advantage of being taught English Language by more than one teacher and, this will expose the students to the various teaching strategies that the different teachers may utilize just as the different attitudes and personalities of the teachers would rub off on the students. Similarly, students would easily escape being wrongly taught since they only need to pose questions on grey areas to the next teacher of English. The above views have presented different viewpoints each with its justification. This study therefore will vindicate the actual picture of existing trends in Yobe state secondary schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A huge number of researches have been continuously examining the causes of mass failures in secondary schools and proffering ways of reversing the ugly trend. There are so many buck passing that result to this lackluster performance (Fasasi Alowonle, Amadi 2013). According to Odusina and Makilekwe (1992, 1993) a major challenge that causes problem in the area of teaching and learning English language is the shortage of foreign textbooks as available Nigerian books are beyond the readability and level of the students hence, students read at frustration levels. Ogunleye (1999) on his part put it that incessant strikes by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and unprepared closure of schools are some of the factors that affects performance of students in English language. In his arguments Adegbile (2006) cites a

reason for student's useful performances in examinations that the English language teachers in themselves lack communicative competence. If this is the case, according to him with many teachers our expectations from the learners, then should be negative and poor performances in the examination is going to be an order of the day. The instructive position of the Federal Government as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) that no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. Faleke and Ibrahim (2011) add that other factors that negatively affects our student's orthography or writing is one of the major skills in English language. GSM text messaging has invariably adulterated the Standard English usage in Nigeria.

Similarly, Oluremi (2012), subscribes to the view that infrastructure which include save learning environment, language lab etc. play a substantial role in the teaching and learning English language and their insufficiency. Oluremi concludes that providing basic school infrastructure should be part of any plan to improve student's performances at all levels.

In the same vein, Njemanze (2012) highlights that one of the major determinants of learner performance as poor teacher performance affects learners' performance'. Some additional problems identified are inconsistency on the part of government, the emergence of Nigerian English (NE), mother tongue interference, (Maduekwe 2017) poverty (Lacour & Tissington, 2011) imbalance in learner/teacher ratio, learner readiness/maturity, poor teacher/learner motivation, indiscipline among learners and teachers as well as examination malpractice (Njemanze, 2012).

Wiriyaichitra, (2002) in her study, came up with the causes of difficulties in English language teaching and learning in Thailand especially in primary and secondary schools. Some of these problems according to her are teachers' heavy teaching loads, inadequately furnished classrooms and educational technology, the university entrance examination system, teachers' insufficiency English language skills and cultural and socio-cultural knowledge. Other problems that hinder students' fluency in English include: lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives, unchallenging English lessons, being passive learners, shyness to speak English with their classmates, being poorly motivated and lack of responsibility for their own learning. These problems and many more have been the stumbling blocks towards students' positive performance in English language as mentioned earlier.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed method research design. This design refers to collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The rationale behind this assumption is that the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself (Creswell, 2014). Under this research design, the study specifically employed the Convergent Parallel design. The basic assumption behind this approach is that it will give the researchers the opportunity to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the result to understand a research problem. A basic rationale for this design is that one data collection form supplies strength to offset the weaknesses of the other form and that a more complete understanding of a research problem results from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014).

3.1 Methods of data collection

Owing to the nature of the research questions of this study, data were collected through various methods namely, questionnaire, interviews, and content analysis. A questionnaire is a form used in survey design that participants in a study complete and return to the researcher (Creswell 2014). Questionnaires were used in this research to obtain information for research questions 1, 2, and 4. In the same instance, because the study used both open-ended and closed-ended questions during the interview, the use of both quantitative and qualitative interviews become necessary and they were used to answer questions 1 and 3. In addition, content analysis which deals with analysis of documents which consist of government and private records of participants and/or sites were also employed to get information for research question 2.

3.1.1 Research Site

The research sites are Yobe state, the main focus of the research, Zamfara state which has similar problem with Yobe state. These two states interchange position at the national ranking in terms of failure in SSCE. Selecting Zamfara state will also contribute towards justifying the research problem. Edo and Abia states like Yobe and Zamfara states often swap position at the highest position in the national ranking which is between first and third positions. So, the comparison of these states as observed by the researchers will contribute towards addressing the research problem.

3.1.2 Population of the study

The population of the study are all senior secondary schools both government and private schools. There are 47 government secondary schools in where 40 secondary schools are conventional secondary schools, and 7 science-based secondary schools in Yobe state, 2 Federal government secondary schools, and 23 Private secondary schools making 72 secondary schools in total.

3.1.3 Sample of the Study

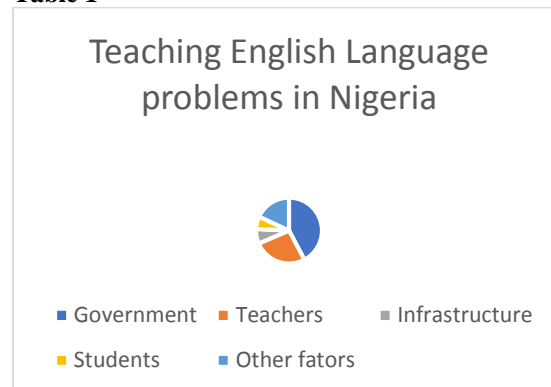
The primary target of this study government secondary schools, hence majority of the sample is going to be selected from them. The researchers are going to take a sample of 4 government secondary schools from the 3 zones that Yobe state has; Zone A, B and C and 1 Private school from each Zone and finally one Federal secondary school from Zone B only. The total number of the sample for the research is going to be 16 secondary schools in Yobe state and 4 four secondary schools two (2) from Abia state and two (2) from Edo state respectively.

3.1.4 Steps in Data Collection

The selection of the sampled schools involved three steps First, the secondary schools that are performing above the average criteria set by the researchers will be identified based on the records available at the state Ministry of Education and those that are performing below average four government secondary schools and one private school will be identified in each zone in Yobe state. Second, a survey will begin to identify the problems based on the focus of the research questions. Third, potential problems identified will be examined in comparison with that of the least performing state. This means that the process of data collection will be carried out simultaneously in Yobe and Zamfara states. The same procedure will be applied to identify the schools in two performing states and later the findings will be compared and analysed.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1



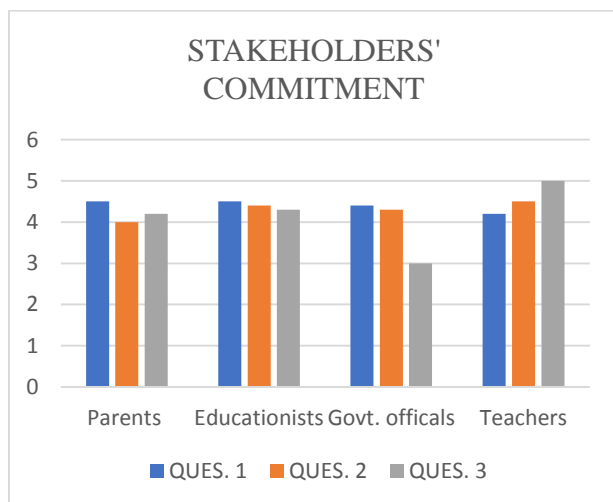


Table 2

The research questions of the study will be restated for more clarification towards answering them.

1. What are the problems that cause massive failure in English language in SSCE in Yobe state?

Findings from this research question can be presented below.

As can be seen from figure 1, the main cause of failure in English language in Yobe state is government while other factors such as the quality of teachers, infrastructure, students and other factors follow. Problem involving government has to do with paying great attention to teachers and students, provision of quality reading and writing materials and effective supervision.

On the part of teachers, questions raised in the questionnaire generated these response, that most of the teachers are incompetent, they lack the basic skills of teaching. Teachers here constitute the large number according to the study. Similarly, students have problems peculiar to them. For instance, they do not spend time practicing what they were taught. They spend most of their time on Social Media websites. The students lack exposure practicing communicating in English in their classes with their colleagues. They have problem with writing which is one of the basic skills which is one of the basic skills when in learning English language. They have a problem with the history and they have to engage in tasks that will develop their vocabulary.

Another factor that is significant is the infrastructure. It contributes positively towards total well-being of the students and provide avenue for effective

learning. The infrastructure includes security of the learning environment, lighting of the classes, seats, desks, educational technology, writing boards teaching aids etc. it receives high number of response in the category. Other factors may include, bullying among students, which is psychological in nature, curricular and textbooks. The problematic areas comprise the rigidity of the textbooks, curricular, having too much to cover under limited time, teachers not understanding the details of the curricular, teachers training and workshop on current teaching and learning, problems assessing students in dynamic computers, internet service, functional language laboratories, lack of teacher who are native speakers or interacting with them from time to time, drills.

Research Question 2

1. Are there differences between the curriculum used in Yobe state secondary schools and the one provided by SSCE bodies?

Based on the responses under this research question, there is no difference in the curricular provided by the examination bodies and the one used in Yobe state Secondary schools. The problem realised was that the teachers are not adhering to the curricular provided to them in addition to that, that the curricular provided by the schools are outdated. In this case, the government on its side, need to provide the update curricular and ensure strict compliance of it. Items under this research question receives quite high number of responses.

1. To what extent are the stakeholders in secondary schools committed towards the success of English language in SSCE in Yobe state?

When ask the major stakeholders in this category such as parents education officials and government officials, they all assured with dismay and most of them suggested the way forward as can be seen in the chart above.

4.1 Discussion (Abridged)

From the results above, it is clear that some of the problems that cause massive failure in the English language in Yobe state. Senior Secondly school are numerous are similar. This study is similar in its findings with the one conducted by Noopon (2002). The finding in Noopon's study also vindicated that the problems particular to the teachers, curricular and text books are of the causes of failure in English language among students. Akbar (2005) adds that one of the problems of learning English is the weak learning system

throughout the academic education. As found out by this study, lack of infrastructure and development may hinder quality teaching in school. Akbar's (2015) Findings are in consonance with the current research. In addition, students lack motivation encouragement learning strategy and other similar related variables. Most of the teachers in secondary school in Yobe state are not well-trained, there are no proper workshops for developing their capability. Another problem realised in the research is that the large number of students in classrooms. This constitutes a huge task for teachers that cannot even have ample time to individually attend or assess their students appropriately. This finding is important as it coincide with findings of Noom-ura (2013). The study shows that Thai teachers are surprisingly coping well with the impractical curricular and textbooks difficulties with language assessment and limited availability of computers and other instructional aids

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the causes of massive failure in SSCE in English Language. It surveys almost 56 secondary schools. From this number, 47 are in Yobe state while the remaining 6 secondary schools are from the other states. A mixed method of data collection was employed and the results of the study revealed an interesting finding. Some of the problems that cause these failures in Yobe state despite the huge amount that are consistently been injecting into education sector are: problems involving themselves, curricula and textbooks, assessment, and other factors supporting teaching success at a moderate level. They see a high level of problems resulting from students' lack of exposure to English and insufficient background of the language. Students' lack of perseverance in practicing or seeking more opportunities to practice the language also contributes to their lack of confidence in using language for communication. Both teachers and students need to show a high level of interest and value to all areas contributing to their career success: their own English proficiency, and instructional/pedagogical strategies for teaching and assessing productive skills such as listening-speaking and writing skills in particular.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Abdullahi Kaigama was born in Nigeria on the 27th September, 1980. He attended College of Education Gashua, Yobe state, Nigeria, and graduated in the year 2000, he also attended University of Maiduguri where he had his first degree, BA English language in

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